DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 303 788 CS 009 529

TITLE	Teaching Reading & Writing: In College, in High School, in Every Subject.
INSTITUTION	New Jersey Basic Skills Council, Trenton.
SPONS AGENCY	New Jersey State Dept. of Higher Education, Trenton.
PUB DATE	84
NOTE	35p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Basic Skills; Higher Education; High Schools; *Minimum Competency Testing; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Skills; Teaching Methods; Test Results; Writing Across the Curriculum; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS	New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test; Test Content

ABSTRACT

This booklet by a committee appointed to assess the teaching implications of the Reading and Writing tests of the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test (NJCBSPT) is intended to provide ways of helping teachers assist students to improve their skills in reading and writing by, in part, pinpointing the major weaknesses of students taking the NJCBSPT. The booklet is divided into five parts: (1) observations about student performance on the test; (2) conclusions based upon these observations as well as upon committee members' experience in the classroom; (3) practical recommendations for the teaching of reading and writing; (4) sample questions from the NJCBSPT and examples of student responses to a recently administered writing topic; and (5) a bibliography offering resource material for the teaching of reading and writing. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED303788

Teaching Reading & Writing

- *in college*
- *in high school*
- *in every subject*

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Johnson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

NJ

NEW JERSEY BASIC SKILLS COUNCIL

OBSERVATIONS DERIVED FROM THE RESULTS OF THE NEW JERSEY COLLEGE BASIC SKILLS PLACEMENT TEST

2

CS 009 529

New Jersey
State Board of Higher Education

Thomas H. Gassert
Chair

Deborah P. Wolfe
Vice Chair

William O. Baker
Edward E. Barr
Floyd H. Bragg
S. David Brandt
Milton A. Buck
Hugh E. Defazio, Jr.
Nino Falcone
Rabbi Martin Freedman
Milton Gelzer
Paul Hardin
Erna Hoover
Albert W. Merck
Donald A. Peterson
Eleanor Todd

T. Edward Hollander
Chancellor of Higher Education

Saul Cooperman
Ex Officio

ED3037788

Teaching Reading & Writing

- in college
- in high school
- in every subject

CS005529

NJ
NEW JERSEY BASIC SKILLS COUNCIL

Acknowledgments

It would not have been possible to undertake the task of preparing this booklet without the help of faculty and administrators from New Jersey colleges and high schools. Their support and contributions are deeply appreciated.

The New Jersey State Board and Department of Higher Education, particularly Chancellor T. Edward Hollander, Vice Chancellor Franklyn Jenifer, and Assistant Chancellor Edward Goldberg, have always been a source of encouragement. Without their support of the New Jersey Basic Skills Assessment Program, this booklet would not have evolved.

The members of the New Jersey Basic Skills Council and the Reading and Writing Advisory Committee, whose names are listed in the back of this booklet, have been uncompromising in their belief that virtually all students at all levels can develop proficiency in the basic skills. It is this philosophy that guides the spirit of the recommendations set forth in *Teaching Reading and Writing*.

Daniel O'Day, chair of the Reading and Writing Committee, worked tirelessly—far beyond the call of duty—in preparing drafts, editing, and bringing all the loose ends together. This project could not have been completed without his painstaking work and dedication.

Special thanks are also due to former Reading and Writing Committee members Carmen Collins, Del Earisman, Diane Gruenberg, Susan McNamara, Martha Palmere, and Richard Swartz for their contributions and support.

Gertrude Conlan, of Educational Testing Service, lent her encouragement, advice, and endless patience throughout the preparation of the booklet.

Two other people were especially important to this effort. Shari Santapau, of the Basic Skills Assessment Program, was always available to us just when her help was needed most. Finally, we are deeply grateful to Edward Morante, former Director of the New Jersey Basic Skills Assessment Program. His enthusiasm and insistence on the need to provide teachers with pedagogic information gleaned from NJCBSPT results have been a source of inspiration to us all.

Anthony D. Lutkus, *Director*
New Jersey Basic Skills
Assessment Program

September 1984

© New Jersey Department of Higher Education. All rights reserved.

Contents

Introduction 4

Observations about Student Performance on the Reading and Writing Sections of the NJCBSPT 7

Conclusions about Reading and Writing 12

Some Practical Ways of Emphasizing Reading and Writing across the Curriculum 15

The New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test

Reading Comprehension 19

Sentence Sense 23

Essay 25

Bibliography

Selected Bibliography on Teaching Writing 28

Selected Bibliography on Teaching Reading 30

Selected Bibliography on Reading/Writing Relationships 30

Introduction

This booklet on the teaching implications of the Reading and Writing tests of the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test (NJCBSPT) is intended to provide ways of helping teachers help students to improve their skills in reading and writing. It does so, in part, by pinpointing the major weaknesses of students taking the NJCBSPT. The booklet is divided into five parts:

- Observations about student performance on the examination
- Conclusions based upon these observations as well as upon committee members' experiences in the classroom
- Practical recommendations about the teaching of reading and writing
- Sample questions from the NJCBSPT and examples of student responses to a recently administered writing topic
- A bibliography offering resource material for the teaching of reading and writing

Few of today's high school and college teachers would deny that the students of our state, like those throughout the entire country, have serious problems in reading and writing. Even though some observers may be quick to point the finger of blame at a particular group or cause, anyone who has dealt with the problem even indirectly recognizes the naivete of such an attitude. Schools are confronted with myriad political, economic, and social pressures unique to the times in which we live. Similarly, students are beset with distractions, restrictions, and freedoms that often keep them from reaching expected levels of basic skills.

Rather than arguing over where responsibility lies, it is more profitable to analyze the nature of the problem itself and to look toward possible solutions. By appointing the New Jersey Basic Skills Council and mandating the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test, the State Board of Higher Education has taken a positive step toward rem-

edying the problem. Students admitted to state-supported colleges in New Jersey are required to take the NJCBSPT and, as part of this examination, to write for twenty minutes on a specified topic. This writing sample is used to measure their writing ability, as is a multiple-choice portion of the examination entitled Sentence Sense. Still another group of multiple-choice questions measures their level of reading comprehension. These three segments of the examination, in conjunction with the sections related to computation and algebra, measure the skills that any individual entering college, or in fact graduating from high school, should possess.

The college and high school faculty members on the Basic Skills Council's Reading and Writing Advisory Committee have, over the past six years, played an important role in developing and evaluating the NJCBSPT reading and writing tests. Through their participation in the holistic scoring of the writing samples and their careful examination of student responses to multiple-choice questions on the reading and writing tests, these teachers know what characterizes different levels of verbal performance throughout the state. Because they have had the opportunity to read and study many of the 65,000 writing samples produced each testing year and because they are responsible for the quality of the tests as a whole, they are in a unique position to comment upon the tests themselves and their relationship to the curriculum.

Any test, by its very nature, imposes a series of restrictions and artificial situations upon the student; still, the results of a good test, when studied in conjunction with other evidence of student performance, can be useful both to the student and to the instructor. In order to extend the usefulness of the NJCBSPT, the following comments are addressed to a wide audience—community leaders, prospective employers, school administrators, parents, and particularly teachers at all levels and in all disciplines. It is the belief of the Reading and Writing Committee that cooperative effort will eventually help us all to improve students' reading and writing skills.

*Observations about Student Performance on the Reading and Writing Sections of the NJCBSPT**

Students' scores on the NJCBSPT reading and writing sections show a high correlation with one another.

A high score on the Reading Comprehension section of the test is accompanied in a majority of cases by a high writing score. Similarly, weakness in reading often goes hand in hand with writing deficiencies. Students who read extensively seem to have an abundance of models upon which to base their own writing. Conversely, students who write well appear to have developed the ability to appreciate someone else's statements and implications. A writer's fluency is often the product of extensive reading; and control, sense of organization, clear diction, as well as command of individual sentences, may well stem from an understanding of what good readers look for in a text. Every aspect of student performance on the writing sample clearly supports the strong relationship between reading and writing—from the vocabulary used to the kinds of examples chosen to support ideas.

Many students appear to be skimming over reading passages that require careful reading.

Questions based upon the reading passages in the NJCBSPT are often ones that cannot be answered merely by skimming the passages. These passages, presenting sophisticated concepts or written in a sophisticated style, must be read carefully, for often the exact meaning hinges on tone or on the use of a particularly important single word. Some students appear to be relying upon guessing and skimming (perhaps to outwit the test maker) and are thus not giving the passages and other materials in the test the close reading they require. Test administrators observe that many students finish the Reading test early even though these students respond to every question. Their fast re-

* These observations are based on the NJCBSPT Reading and Writing Committee's study of the statistical analyses of individual multiple-choice questions and the statistical analyses of each new form of the NJCBSPT as well as the members first-hand experiences in scoring the essays written for the NJCBSPT.

sponse, however, is not an indication either that they have read what has been presented to them or that they have performed successfully.

Students taking the reading comprehension test often have difficulty recognizing or selecting an appropriate paraphrase.

If a particular question about a reading passage requires simple reference to the exact words used in that passage, most students are able to perform well on that question. However, when confronted with questions involving restatement of an idea, they have considerably more trouble selecting the correct response. They are often unable to identify a paraphrase and seem frequently unaware of what paraphrasing means. In some cases, it seems that students have been taught inappropriate test-taking skills because they tend to choose as answers those responses that merely duplicate some wording of the text without regard to the appropriateness of that wording as a response to the question asked.

Many students taking the NJCBSPT possess limited information, a problem that manifests itself in poor reading skills.

Though questions on the Reading test are based on ideas, theories, facts, and implications to be found in the passage given, students are expected to bring to the test a certain general knowledge. For example, they should know or be able to guess from context what a tornado, a moon, or an embryo is. They should know what terms like "holding out for higher wages," "orbiting the earth," or "referring to a higher court" mean. They should have an idea of what inflation is, what natural resources are, and what a film studio is for. Some students taking the test, unfortunately, do not seem to have the information about the world that high school graduates should have, information acquired through reading, through the other media, or through merely observing and listening to those around them.

As the following reading selection from the NJCBSPT shows, students do not need in-depth knowledge about any particular subject to understand the passages in the test, but they do need some general information to understand the text.

Most of us have heard the stories of the Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth Rock and of such figures as Samuel Adams and Paul Revere, who played important parts in the American Revolution. We have thus come to accept the influence of the English on United States history. We sometimes forget, however, that another country had a considerable influence upon our country, particularly in the West and the Southwest. Such place names as Nevada and California, San Francisco and Santa Fe reveal the influence of Spain, as do words like lasso, arroyo, canyon, mesa, rodeo, pinto, *and* ranch, *all of which are of Spanish origin. They bear witness to the settlement and development of the Southwest by people of Spanish ancestry.*

Many of the twenty-minute writing samples students produce for the NJCBSPT show one or more of the following weaknesses.

Lack of Fluency:

Students responding to the topic often seem uneasy and unfamiliar with the written word, probably because they have had few or painful experiences with writing. For them, written language has become an obstacle to, rather than a vehicle for, expression. Lack of practice in writing, as well as fear of the constant correction that sometimes is part of writing instruction, leads students to incorrect assumptions about what constitutes good writing; these assumptions frequently keep them from appreciating the value of their own ideas and from putting those ideas down in writing. Thus, they fail to develop their thoughts adequately and depend heavily upon clusters of clichés as a substitute for thinking. Further, many students display almost no variety in the structure of their sentences, indicating little familiarity with the way sentence structure can be used both to enhance ideas and to interest the reader in what is being said.

Absence of a Controlling Idea:

Many of the writing samples produced for the NJCBSPT lack a sense of direction. While it is obviously difficult to present an elaborate sequence of ideas in a limited time period, some sequence, some consistency is to be expected. Moreover, though students are not expected to produce complete, fully developed essays during the test, they should at least suggest in their early statements that they are working toward a conclusion. If such direction and control are not present, then the piece of writing no longer achieves its primary goal—effective communication.

Little Sense of Organization:

Many twenty-minute writing samples show little awareness of the need to organize thoughts so that the reader may clearly understand what is being said. If ideas are divided into paragraphs, often those paragraphs lack unity. While time limitations may prevent student writers from organizing material in a sophisticated fashion, students should, within twenty minutes, be able to design a structure that supports and even enhances the subject matter.

Problems with Diction and Idiom:

A great many students taking the test have problems with vocabulary and idiom. The words that they use to express particular ideas are often inappropriate in meaning or are carelessly related to other words in the sentence. Even the more accomplished students demonstrate little variety in their diction, a failing which, though it may not always inhibit communication, does indicate a minimum of exposure to the written word. Moreover, many students do not know how to use the idioms of English, writing such phrases as "superior over," "intimidated toward," "in opposition for." Seemingly, such students choose any preposition that comes to mind because they know that one belongs there, but they are not familiar enough with the written language to know which one.

Limited Understanding of Sentence Structure:

The ability to understand the relationships between parts of a sentence is tested by the multiple-choice Sentence Sense section of the NJCBSPT as well as by the essay. Students frequently have difficulty

both in recognizing run-on sentences and sentence fragments in another person's writing and in avoiding them in their own. Although they may have been taught the traditional rules for determining complete sentences, students still need practice in applying these rules in their own writing. Mastery of the varieties of sentence structure available to the writer in English is essential if students are to state their ideas clearly, communicate a particular relationship between ideas, and establish emphasis within the sentence they use to express an idea.

Inability to Avoid Errors of Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling that Distract and Confuse the Reader:

While the twenty minutes allowed for the NJCBSPT writing sample do not permit much time for proofreading, many of the grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors appearing in the writing samples are so extensive as to suggest that no amount of proofreading would succeed in eliminating them. Students, though they may be aware of the need for technical correctness, are frequently unable to apply whatever grammar, punctuation, or spelling rules they have learned. Nor do they seem to recognize that the failure to apply these rules in their writing not only may have a negative effect upon sentence structure or be an impediment to the process of communication itself, but may also cause a negative reaction in the reader.

Conclusions about Reading and Writing

Reading and writing do not exist in isolation.

Reading, writing, and thinking are interrelated. This idea is not new. Nor is the idea that being knowledgeable and informed enhances one's ability to understand what one reads and to write, speak, and listen intelligently. Like the acquisition of knowledge, development and enhancement of language skills should be encouraged in every classroom; in turn, the development of the skills will make the learning of new subjects and the acquisition of new information easier.

Because they are thinking skills, reading and writing should be emphasized not only at all educational levels but also across the curriculum.

The good student is one who reads, writes, and thinks with the sophistication appropriate to his or her educational level. In the process of instruction every teacher relies on the language skills and associated thinking skills. However, faculty members from various disciplines frequently relegate the teaching of these skills to English departments, assuming that it is the responsibility of English teachers, and no one else, to ensure their development. But reading and writing are the province of all teachers, and these skills are valuable tools in the process of learning, whether the field be mathematics, history, music, or physical education. Someone who reads well can almost always absorb and analyze course material more effectively than someone who does not. The person who writes constantly about a subject, even if that writing is informal, gains a unique perspective on what is being studied. Language is the fundamental tool of thought and learning, and the skills associated with it must be nurtured by everyone who teaches.

Reading and writing require active participation.

Too often writers rely passively on clichés as the easiest way to express thoughts. Such reliance prevents them from testing, exploring,

pondering, connecting, and learning—practices essential to effective writing. Readers also must be active. They must respond to what is being read, showing a willingness to make connections and ask questions. Moreover, they must strive not only to understand the ideas presented but also to examine the validity and worth of what has been said. Good reading and good writing require active use of clear, critical thinking.

Students should be made aware of reading and writing as important and relevant forms of communication.

Too often we hear that advances in technology are rendering reading and writing obsolete. This assumption is simply not true. Anyone who has been even remotely involved with computers knows the importance of clear thinking and exact expression in the development of a computer program. Similarly, the ability to respond intelligently to what one hears or sees on the electronic media is inextricably tied to one's ability to comprehend and analyze what one has read. Writers must always see themselves in a broad sense as communicators. Readers must see themselves as people to whom ideas are being directed. The skills learned in writing and reading have extensive application in all forms of communication.

Students must be encouraged to reread and rewrite.

Although some materials may be appropriate for skimming and some writing may not demand revision, students should be able to recognize when it is appropriate to reread or to rewrite. Furthermore, they should be encouraged to do so—even required to do so—when circumstances warrant. They should also be encouraged to think of reading as a process that allows them to preread, read, and reread, suiting their activities to the materials and the purpose for which they are reading. They should be encouraged to think about what they are writing and why they are writing; they should learn that the process of getting their ideas on paper in a way that is clear and interesting to others involves thinking before writing, during writing, and even after writing.

Students at all levels should be encouraged to do more reading and writing both at school and at home.

Teachers, parents, even acquaintances within the community should be aware of the need to serve as role models to students. They should read and write in the presence of young people and thereby encourage them by example to read and write more frequently. Too often both activities are considered burdensome, and the rewards and pleasures of each belittled. Students can learn from example that reading and writing can provide excellent recreation. They should learn that reading and writing enhance the process of discovering and learning in exciting and satisfying ways.

Some Practical Ways of Emphasizing Reading and Writing across the Curriculum

Include one or more essay questions in every test.

Essay examinations are appropriate in all subjects. Requiring students to put their ideas about a subject in their own words not only helps them develop their writing skills and their thinking skills, but also reinforces the learning that has taken place. Essay examinations are an excellent way of measuring the higher-level skills being taught in each classroom. Before they take such essay examinations, however, students should be given instruction in the most effective ways to read the examination questions and to answer them. For example, they might be asked to write a practice essay response. Or class discussions preceding the essay assignment might be conducted in such a way as to reflect the kind of structure expected in the essay. Or teachers might help students clarify their understanding of strong, mediocre, or weak writing by providing them with essay samples of varying quality. Once the examination has been corrected, it is, of course, helpful to discuss the responses with students, either individually or as a group.

Reinforce good reading habits by helping the student to know the textbook.

In every class students should be introduced to the textbook they will use. The teacher should point out how the book is organized, how information is highlighted, what the glossary and index are. For some students more detailed explanations may be necessary in order to help them recognize the usefulness of the index or glossary. Others might not know just how to read the figures or charts, or even understand how the photographs provide illustration for a particular idea. Teachers in all disciplines can and should point to clues that indicate what a textbook is about and how it should be read.

Make students aware that finding the meaning of a text involves more than knowing what each word means.

Students must become aware that good readers use more than a knowledge of the meaning of individual words to find meaning. Good

readers are aware of tone and connotations and what they add to the meaning of a text. They see implications and assumptions. They evaluate what has been said. To help students form the habit of analyzing and thinking critically about what they read, teachers can question them about such matters as underlying meaning, author's attitude, the validity of the evidence used, the logic of the argument. Their habits of critical reading can also be developed by discussing with them such things as why a particular piece of writing has been written, what attitudes the author expects them to have when they have finished reading, and what in their own lives or their own learning supports or refutes the author's ideas.

Teach students how to deal with the more difficult works that they are required to read.

Students should know how to preview a book by looking at chapter headings and studying the highlights of each section. They should understand how to skim an essay by searching for the thesis statement, by glancing at the introduction and conclusion, and by noting the first sentence of each paragraph. As a next step, they should read more closely, focusing upon the important ideas in a work. And finally, they should be able to identify the author's main idea, the evidence used to support it, and the methods used to present it, rereading as necessary to secure the information they need from the text.

Teach students to adjust their reading habits and styles to fit the material they are reading.

Reading an easy description does not require the kind of concentration demanded in reading a difficult analysis. An algebra text, a legal document, and a popular novel must be read in different ways. Students should understand that written works differ and that, as readers, they must modify their methods of reading accordingly.

Ask students to respond in writing to an important word, phrase, sentence, or group of sentences in the textbook.

Asking students to focus their attention, by writing, on an aspect of the subject matter being studied will help them identify concepts or

ideas they might otherwise have missed. Writing can lead students to a better understanding of ideas that they previously might have found difficult to comprehend. It can also help students to develop their own ideas as well as informed opinions.

Encourage students to compose written summaries of lectures, discussions, or materials studied.

Various methods of using written summaries to aid learning are available to the teacher. One such method is to ask one or two members of the class to take notes on what has happened or has been said. Students might also occasionally be assigned exercises in which they take notes and, at the end of the class, rework them into a brief but well-organized paragraph. The teacher needs to provide instruction in a variety of note-taking techniques and to allow plenty of time for practice.

Be prepared to help students with a research paper by providing step-by-step supervision.

Students need considerable assistance in finding a topic, developing a question, locating research materials, and then designing an argument based upon those materials. A research project is a crystallization of the learning that has taken place and should always be accompanied by the careful instruction that such an important project deserves.

Encourage students to rewrite their essays and reports.

Revision should not be an afterthought but an integral part of the writing process. Students should be encouraged not only to revise what they themselves have written but also to make constructive suggestions that will help classmates revise what they have written. One way of making students aware of the importance of revision is to delay giving a grade until after revisions have been done.

Encourage peer review of written assignments.

With careful training students can soon learn to evaluate one another's writing. Seeing a range of writing styles sharpens students' criti-

cal skills and helps them to understand that they are not alone in the class in needing instruction. In addition, peer review provides critical insight into the students' own writing, helping them to revise their papers. Eliminating the need for the teacher to comment on each paper and each revision written by each student allows substantially more writing to be assigned to the class in the same time period.

One way of accomplishing peer review is to teach students holistic evaluation. Evaluating a piece of writing as a whole helps students to appreciate what good writing is and to understand what they are working toward in their own writing. Students trained to look at all aspects of writing become aware of the importance of such matters as addressing an audience appropriately, organizing well, choosing appropriate words to express ideas, and attempting to interest the reader. They learn how punctuation and spelling can affect a reader and understand just how such surface features of writing contribute to the piece of writing as a whole. Samples of essays written for the NJCBSPT and comments about their holistic evaluation are to be found in the free NJCBSPT booklet, *Scoring the Essays*.

Ask students on occasion to read for pleasure or to write something that they know will not be judged.

Do not feel that all reading should be subject to questioning or that all writing must be graded, corrected, or even commented upon.

Encourage students to keep personal records about their reading habits.

The thorough reading log may go a long way in helping to improve reading skills. Keeping such a log, while it focuses the student's attention on reading, is also conducive to good writing.

The New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test

The NJCBSPT was designed especially to determine which students admitted to college need special help in certain basic skills; that is, the test was designed to discover which of the entering students do not have the level of skills generally expected of college freshmen and deemed necessary to their being able to complete their academic programs successfully. Thus, the basic skills measured by the test are defined not as the skills necessary to survive in the world (filling out applications, reading directions on medicine bottles, or the like) but as the skills needed to read college textbooks, to write papers for class, to solve mathematical problems, and, indeed, to succeed in a technological society.

The portions of the NJCBSPT dealing with verbal skills yield the following scores:

1. Total English score, a composite score based on the Reading Comprehension, Sentence Sense, and Essay sections
2. Reading Comprehension
3. Sentence Sense
4. Essay
5. Composition score, a composite score based on the Sentence Sense and Essay sections.

A more detailed explanation of the test can be found in *Interpreting Scores on the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test*, and a more detailed explanation of the writing sample can be found in *Scoring the Essays*; both booklets are available from the Department of Higher Education (see page 31).

Reading Comprehension

The Reading Comprehension section of the test measures students' ability to understand what a written text says, to extract the main idea from the text, and to draw appropriate inferences from statements made in the text. Most, but not all, of the questions testing these skills

are related to passages printed in the test book. The passages cover a variety of subjects and represent a variety of writing purposes and styles.

Students taking the test are expected to read the passages carefully, not merely skim them; they are expected to know what the text actually says, not merely what they think it might say. Close reading and attention to detail are expected, as is attention to tone. Students are expected to be able to generalize about the ideas in the passage and their method of presentation. They are also expected to be able to identify ideas found in the passage when those ideas are stated in different words and to understand and identify the assumptions made by the author and the implications of the text.

For those NJCBSPT questions that are unrelated to passages, students are asked to identify the generalization that will be supported by a group of statements or to identify the idea that best supports a generalization given.

Examples of the types of multiple-choice questions used in the Reading Comprehension section follow.

For each of the questions in this section, you are to select from the four suggested answers the one which is best and blacken the corresponding space on your answer sheet.

Some of the questions will test how well you understand certain passages. Answer these questions on the basis of what is *stated* or *implied in the passage*.

[1]There is a great deal of communication between Chinese teachers and parents, especially when the younger children move into new school settings. [2]Some communication takes place informally when parents walk young children to the school or pick them up, but there are a number of other more formal modes of communication, usually initiated by the schools. [3]These include meetings for parents, most often held early in the school year or at the end of the year, visits from teachers to the homes of the students, and small notebooks that pass back and forth between school and home, referred to as "communication books" or "connection notebooks." [4]The exchange between school and home in China, apparently so much more fluid and continuous than that in the United States, may be the result of the more stable and tighter organization of Chinese neighborhoods. [5]Schools generally seem to be less isolated from homes in China than they are in the West.

The main idea in this passage is that

(A) schools in China are better organized than are schools in the United States
(B) communication between teachers and parents in the United States is poor
(C) Chinese parents and teachers communicate frequently with each other
(D) communication between parents and teachers eliminates certain problems in China's schools

The first sentence of the paragraph indicates what the paragraph is about, and the idea of that first sentence is contained in choice (C). Organization of schools and problems in the schools are not mentioned in the paragraph, and B may be implied in the passage but it is not the main idea. Students who did not answer this question correctly were clearly not reading the passage carefully.

According to this passage, most informal communication between Chinese parents and teachers occurs

(A) at the beginning and end of a young child's school day
(B) when a child is doing well enough to be promoted
(C) when parents voluntarily come to the school to inquire about the child's progress
(D) when parents request that the teacher visit them at home

The answer to this question is contained in the second sentence of the paragraph. Choice (A) restates the information provided there.

The author suggests that the school-family connection in China is

(A) similar in most aspects to what it is in the United States
(B) supported by neighborhood organizations
(C) stronger than it is in the United States
(D) usually controlled by the parents

The inference is based on the last two sentences. To arrive at (C) the student needs to understand the implications of "more fluid and continuous" and "less isolated from."

What is the function of sentence 5 in the passage?

(A) It clarifies and concludes ideas presented in sentence 4
(B) It introduces an implied comparison
(C) It provides an exception to a point made in sentence 4
(D) It introduces a new idea.

Sentence 5 continues the comparison between parent-teacher com-

munication in China and parent-teacher communication in the United States, restating the comparison directly and briefly. Sentence 5 therefore functions in relation to sentence 4 as described in choice (A).

In the following questions, four statements are given. One is a main idea and the other three are statements that support this main idea. Select the *main idea* and mark the corresponding letter on your answer sheet.

(A) *The days on the road playing tournament after tournament are exhausting for professional tennis players.*
(B) *The fans usually root for the underdog, and so a star player on a winning streak usually gets little encouragement.*
(C) *The press bombards famous professional tennis players with questions after every tournament.*
(D) *Even though they earn a great deal of money, champion professional tennis players do not always find life easy.*

Sentences A, B, and C provide support for the generalization found in (D). The student must be able to see what links the ideas together and to identify which of the statements is the generalization and which others supply supporting details for that generalization.

Choose the statement that best supports the main idea for each question and mark the corresponding letter on your answer sheet.

Main idea:
Traditionally, opera companies, art galleries, civic theaters, and symphony orchestras in the United States have depended on financing from private sponsors.

(A) *In Australia public funds, collected as taxes, are used to support the costs of the arts.*
(B) *About sixty percent of the costs of the arts in the United States are met by ticket sales and forty percent by contributions from business, industry, and wealthy patrons.*
(C) *Some artists believe that the federal government should help finance the arts in the United States.*
(D) *Arts activities are often focused in cities, and many rural or suburban dwellers, whose taxes might support the arts, are unable to take advantage of these activities.*

The main idea given is supported only by (B). The other statements may be relevant to the topic, but they do not provide support for the main idea stated.

Sentence Sense

The Sentence Sense section uses two kinds of multiple-choice questions. The first requires the students to identify faults in sentences and make appropriate corrections. The second asks students to rewrite sentences, much as they would do when editing their own writing.

The problems presented to the student for correction are concerned mainly with the structure and logic of sentences, not with problems of subject-verb agreement and the like. Questions deal with expressing ideas clearly and accurately, appropriately coordinating or subordinating ideas within sentences, and recognizing complete sentences. The types of questions used ask students either to identify and correct problems in sentences or to recast sentences to change structure or emphasis—tasks they might perform when they write themselves.

Examples of the types of multiple-choice questions used in the Sentence Sense section follow.

Select the best version of the underlined part of the sentence. Choice (A) is the same as the original sentence. If you think the original sentence is best, choose answer (A).

The record is held by Andrea, it is in the hundred-yard dash.

(A) The record is held by Andrea, it is in the hundred-yard dash.
(B) Andrea holds the record in the hundred-yard dash.
(C) The record in the hundred-yard dash being held by Andrea.
(D) The hundred-yard dash record, which is held by Andrea.

This question asks the student to recognize first that the original sentence neither fits the traditional definition of a complete sentence nor presents the ideas in it in an appropriate way. Choice (B), which is the correct response, eliminates the comma fault and conveys the required information briefly and clearly.

Jenny's Cinderella costume was more elaborate than Henry, who wore a ghost costume.

(A) Henry, who wore a ghost costume
(B) Henry in a ghost costume
(C) Henry's ghost costume
(D) Henry's who wore a ghost costume

This question presents a problem in logic in that the original sentence compares a costume to a person. The sense of the sentence requires that two costumes be compared. Choice (C) is the only one that provides that comparison.

In the following questions, you are going to be asked to rewrite sentences in your head. You will be told exactly how to begin your new sentence. Keep in mind that your new sentence should be well written and should have the same meaning as the sentence given you.

George saw no familiar faces when he looked around the room.

Rewrite, beginning with

Looking around the room,

The next words will be

(A) George saw no familiar faces
(B) no familiar faces could be seen
(C) and seeing no familiar faces
(D) then George saw no familiar faces

To answer this question, the student must remember that George is looking around the room and that, therefore, *George* must be the word to follow the comma in the new sentence. Only by using *George* can the student avoid creating a sentence that has a dangling modifier.

If she had not agreed to work late this evening, she would be able to go shopping for Eleanor's birthday present.

Rewrite, beginning with

She cannot go shopping for Eleanor's birthday present

The next words will be

(A) since her agreement
(B) even though she agreed
(C) without first agreeing
(D) because she has agreed

The sense of the original sentence is kept only when (D) is used to form the new sentence: She cannot go shopping for Eleanor's birthday present because she has agreed to work late this evening.

Essay

In evaluating writing samples, the faculty members who serve as scorers take into consideration every aspect of the writing from subject-verb agreement to organization of ideas, from use of the comma to appropriateness of examples, from spelling to style. Each sample receives two independent scores on a six-point scale and the score reported for the essay is the sum of these two scores. Thus, the highest score is 12, and the lowest is 2.

An example of a topic for a twenty-minute writing sample appears below followed by examples of students' responses to that topic.

Topic:

Young people often want the power and privileges of older people, whereas older people often feel that childhood and youth are the happiest times of life.

Explain some of the advantages or disadvantages of being the age that you are now. Be specific.

Good Response:

As a young woman of eighteen, I feel very fortunate to be young enough to enjoy the benefits of my youth and old enough to be wise in my decisions. Being young allows me to be more carefree than my parents because I have fewer responsibilities weighing my life down. I am old enough to choose my own friends and recreations, and I have a driver's liscence to permit me additional freedom. My parents trust my decisions as mature and responsible, which is very supportive. I am recognized by them as an adult, whereas my younger sister is slightly more restricted. I have also experienced the priviledge of voting in a local ellection, which fulfills a sense of duty for me. My friends feel comfortable having someone to depend on, a responsibility I could not have held up to as well at fourteen. This expansion of my life experiences due to my age status is preparing me for my future by making me a more rounded person.

Being eighteen has its drawbacks. I am not allowed to buy alcohol in the state of New Jersey. This is not a major defeat, but to function in the social circles of adult life, one must socially drink. Because I am still a student,

my age is overruled by my educational status. My parents, however supportive, still view me as a child in some respects because I still live in their house. I have not had the full responsibilites of an adult as yet, and the changes seem slow in coming.

In contrast to this, the life of a child of eight or nine sometimes seems much easier. It is sometimes difficult not to be enviable of their carefree lives. I feel that being eighteen is a rich experience, in view of all of its advantages and disadvantages.

Although this writing sample is good, it is neither perfect nor polished, and it is not expected to be either. Further, the sample demonstrates good writing produced in twenty minutes, not the very best of the writing that students taking the NJCBSPT have produced in twenty minutes or the best writing that students might produce under other circumstances.

The twenty-minute writing sample is essentially a first draft. Despite the errors in diction and spelling, the writer obviously has control of the language: the ideas are generally clearly stated; they are organized; they are pertinent. The sentence structure has some variety. The errors in spelling are not frequent. The writer's major weakness is in the inexact use of words. Even so, the writing is strong enough to justify the rating of the total piece of writing as good.

Mediocre Response:

The advantages of being eighteen are numerous. First of all, it is a time when you are no longer considered a child. The majority of eighteen year olders are heading off to college. This is a new beginning because no longer will people do things for you. Now you must do it for yourself.

New ideas are developed by oneself the emergence of self-discipline and being independant are very important.

One of the best advantages is being on your own and doing what you want to do. This includes good studying habits, staying in shape and enjoying the night life.

I find that the disadvantages are very few. The best one is leaving all your high-school friends behind. The same people you got along with for four years.

Another disadvantage is unavailability of a full-time summer job. this would help cut the high cost of college tremendously.

Finally the lack of respect for not living up to your fullest expectations such as top honors in high school and all-country in basketball.

In closing I would like to say that being eighteen is the greatest time of life.

This sample shows such a combination of the good and the bad that it is neither. Some of the sentences are complete, indicating control of sentence structure; others are fragments. There is some organization to the ideas, but that organization is not consistent. Some of the statements are clear; some are murky. The sentences are not very sophisticated in structure, but neither are they invariably simple. The writing is definitely in the middle range.

Weak Response:

If your in a family with older sisters and brothers you will learn. The older kids get more priveleges, to go out later, and not many questions asked of where they were. Young people have to be in earlier and account for everywhere they have been. Older people think childhood is better because they don't have the worries or expences as an adult which in turn makes their life happier. At the age I am at now respoucibility is greater than ever. Every step I take builds up my tomorrow. And every move I make counts either against it or for it. But now my time to make mistakes and learn how to improve them tomorrow.

Although this writing sample is not at the lowest level produced for the NJCBSPT, it is definitely weak. The sample lacks organization; not even a topic sentence appears. Control of language is weak, interfering with communication. The writer's difficulties with sentence structure, for example, make some of the ideas hard for the reader to comprehend on first reading. Even though the writer does have ideas and those ideas are all relevant to the topic, the writing is weak and the sample deserves a low score.

Bibliography

Selected Bibliography on Teaching Writing

Books:

Camp, Gerald. *A Success Curriculum for Remedial Writers*. Berkeley, California: University of California, 1982.

Foster, David. *A Primer for Writing Teachers*. New York: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1983.

Frederiksen, Carl H., and Dominic, Joseph F., eds. *Writing: The Nature, Development and Teaching of Written Communication*, vol. 2. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1981.

Fulwiler, Toby, and Art Young, eds. *Language Connections: Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*. Illinois: NCTE, 1982.

Gregg, Lee W., and Steinberg, Erwin R., eds. *Cognitive Processes in Writing*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1980.

Hammond, Eugene. *Teaching Writing*. Illinois: McGraw-Hill, 1983.

Hays, Janice, *et al.*, eds. *The Writer's Mind*. Illinois: NCTE, 1983.

Kasden, Lawrence, and Daniel Hoeber, eds. *Basic Writing*. Illinois: NCTE, 1980.

Knoblauch, C. H., and Lil Brannon. *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing*. New York: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1984.

Koch, Carl, and James Brazil. *Strategies for Teaching the Composition Process*. Illinois: NCTE, 1978.

Lindemann, Erika. *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Lundstein, Sarah, ed. *Help for the Teacher of Written Composition (K-9)*. Illinois: NCTE, 1976.

Murphy, James, ed. *The Rhetorical Tradition and Modern Writing*. New York: MLA, 1982.

Myers, Miles, and James Gray, eds. *Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Composition*. Illinois: NCTE, 1983.

Pradle, Gordon, ed. *Prospect and Retrospect: Selected Essays of James Britton*. New York: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1982.

Ruggiero, Vincent. *The Art of Thinking: A Guide to Critical and Creative Thought*. New York: Harper and Row, 1984.

Shaughnessy, Mina. *Errors and Expectations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Siegel, Muffy, and Toby Olson, eds. *Writing Talks*. New York: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1983.

Smith, Frank. *Writing and the Writer*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982.

Sudol, Ronald, ed. *Revising*. Illinois: NCTE, 1982.

Tanner, William, and J. Dean Bishop, eds. *Rhetoric and Change*. Mesquite, Texas: Ide House Publishers, 1982.

Tate, Gary, and Edward Corbett, eds. *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Wolvoord, Barbara. *Helping Students Write Well*. New York: MLA, 1982.

Journals:

The following journals are available from the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801:

College Composition and Communication
College English
Elementary English
English Journal
Research in the Teaching of English

Other Journals:

Journal of Teaching Writing
The Writing Instructor

Selected Bibliography on Teaching Reading

Allinton, Richard L., and Michael Strange. *Learning through Reading in the Content Areas*. Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1980.

Burmeister, Lou. *Reading Strategies for Middle and Secondary School Teachers*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978.

Dishner, Ernest K., Thomas W. Bean, and John E. Readence. *Reading in the Content Areas: Improving Classroom Instruction*. Iowa: Kendall Hunt Publishing Co., 1981.

Forgan, Harry, and Charles Mangrum II. *Teaching Content Area Reading Skills*. 2d ed. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1981.

Herber, Harold L. *Teaching Reading in Content Area*. 2d ed. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1978.

Smith, Carl B. *Teaching Reading in Secondary School Content Subjects: A Book Thinking Process*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978.

Smith, F. *Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read*. 2d ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978.

Tonjes, Marian J., and Miles V. Zintz. *Teaching Reading/Thinking/Study Skills in Content Classrooms*. Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Company, 1981.

Vacca, Richard T. *Content Area Reading*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1981.

Selected Bibliography on Reading/Writing Relationships

Britton, J., T. Burgess, N. Martin, A. McLeod, and H. Rosen. *The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)*. (Schools Council Publications) London: MacMillan Education Ltd., 1975.

Collins, C. *Read, Reflect, Write: The Elements of Flexible Reading, Fluent Writing, Independent Learning*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984.

Graves, Donald H. *Writing: Teacher and Children at Work*. Exeter, New Hampshire: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983.

Grobe, S. F., and G. H. Grobe. Reading Skills as a Correlate of Writing Ability in College Freshmen. *Reading World*, October 1977, *17*(1), 51-54.

Additional information about the NJCBSPT can be obtained from

Director, Basic Skills Assessment Program
Department of Higher Education
225 West State Street—CN542
Trenton, NJ 08625

Information Bulletin—contains sample questions and information for students

Interpreting Scores on the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test—describes the test for those who will use the test results

Scoring the Essays—contains sample essays and explains how the writing sample is scored

New Jersey Basic Skills Council

Anthony D. Lutkus, Director

Madan Capoor, *Chair*
Middlesex County College

William Daly
Stockton State College

Sr. Gabriel Mary Donahue
College of Saint Elizabeth

Frederic Kreisler
Department of Higher Education

Robert Lynch
New Jersey Institute of Technology

Richard Nurse
Rutgers University

Daniel O'Day
Kean College

Don Oppenheim
Rutgers University

Charles Pine
Rutgers University/Newark

Albert Porter
Mercer County Community College

Darwin Williams
Education Opportunity Fund Program

Program Assistants

Irene M. Menditto
Shari Santapau

Reading and Writing Advisory Committee 1984-85

Daniel O'Day, *Chair*
Kean College

Milton Cernansky
Asbury Park School District

Joseph DePierro
Seton Hall University

Dennis Donahue
New Jersey Institute of Technology

William Lutz
Rutgers University/Camden

Miles D. MacMahon
Essex County College

Dorothy Minkoff
Trenton State College

RoseAnn Morgan
Middlesex County College

Barbara O'Breza
Cherry Hill High School West

MaryAnne Palladino
Glassboro State College

Alice Peters
Bergen Community College

John Pufahl
Union County College

Adele Stern
Paramus School District

For information on colleges in New Jersey, call . . .

COLLEGE IN NJ
800-792-8355